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# Increased Levels of Child Labor in India's Cotton Industry Reported

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The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF), along with international partners including OECD Watch, India Committee of the Netherlands, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe and Eine Welt Netz NRW, released a report today focused on recent trends in employment of child labor on cottonseed farms in India. The report estimates that roughly 416,460 children, out of which 224,960 are under the age of 14, are still working on cottonseed farms in the four major producing states in India, representing an increase from the 2003-2004 harvest season.

The report, authored by Davuluri Venkateswarlu, Director of Glocal Research in Hyderabad, surveyed farms in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat and Tamilnadu between September 2006 and February 2007.

In Andhra Pradesh, researchers found that 42.7% of the workforce was children between the ages of 7 and 14;

In Karnataka, 55.6% of the workforce was in the 7-14 age category and 34% were between 15 and 18 (a 13% increase for this age group);

In Tamilnadu, children under 14 made up 46.3% of the workforce and children aged 15-18 constituted 32.6% of the workforce;

In Gujarat, children under 14 were 32.7% of the workforce and children aged 15-18 were 33.4 % of the workforce.

The only state to see a decline in the rate of child labor under 14 was Andhra Pradesh, which has received the most scrutiny from the media, civil society and industry. Most of the children do not attend school and work long hours in the fields. Labor contractors often give the children's parents an advance on the children's low wages and then take them to work on farms in other villages in a form of bonded labor. Due to their close contact with toxic pesticides, children are at risk of serious health problems and the report highlights the cases of three children who dead from toxic poisoning because they were in charge of spraying pesticides on crops. The majority of the children working on cottonseed farms in India are girls.

Multinational corporations Bayer and Monsanto have acknowledged the use of child labor on farms producing for them and have initiated programs to address the issue. While child labor has not been eliminated on their farms, progress is slowly being made.

ILRF Executive Director Bama Athreya said, "It is extremely discouraging to see that child labor continues to grow in the cotton fields of India. Increased pressure from consumers and commitment from multinational corporations is crucial in ensuring an end to child labor in this sector."

Gerard Oonk, Director of the India Committee of the Netherlands said, "The report makes it chillingly clear that our cotton products are tainted with massive bonded child labor. The companies involved, both Indian and multinational, governments and international organizations should make every effort to get the children out of this pernicious work and into school."

The report estimates that the level of child labor in the 2007-2008 harvest season will increase.

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